

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

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R 281425Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8582

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

USMISSION GENEVA

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 HELSINKI 933

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FI

SUBJECT: FINNISH GOVERNMENT CRISIS: THE OLD MASTER -- KEKKONEN

-- TAKES A HAND AT STIRRING THE SOUP

REF: (A) HELSINKI 817 (B) HELSINKI 853

1. SUMMARY. PAST TEN DAYS HAVE BEEN OBJECT LESSON IN FINNISH DOMESTIC POLITICS, PROVING NOT ONLY ITS BYZANTINE NATURE BUT ALSO THAT ONLY PREDICTABLE THING IS ITS UNPREDICTABILITY. THE OLD MASTER POLITICIAN HIMSELF, PRESIDENT KEKKONEN, HAS TAKEN A HAND AT STIRRING THE POLITICAL SOUP. HIS DIRECT INVOLVEMENT AND THE MANEUVERINGS OF THE OTHER LESSER COOKS HAS LED TO CALMING DOWN THE SITUATION, SHIFTS IN POWER POSITION -- AND A FINAL CULMINATION IN KEKKONEN ACCEPTING A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC REQUEST THAT HE STAND FOR RE-ELECTION IN 1978. DESPITE THIS BASIC SITUATION HAS NOT CHANGED. EARLY ELECTIONS ARE STILL CONSIDERED INEVITABLE, WITH ONLY QUESTION BEING WHETHER THEY WILL TAKE PLACE IN AUGUST OR SEPTEMBER. THIS MAY NOT BE DECIDED UNTIL LATE MAY. IT IS ALSO STILL CONFIDENTIAL

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EXPECTED THAT "EXPERT" CARETAKER GOVERNMENT WILL BE

NAMED, POSSIBLY IN JUNE. NEXT TO KEKKONEN HIMSELF, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE IMPROVED THEIR POSITION MOST. CENTER PARTY CHAIRMAN VIROLAINEN HAS STRENGTHENED HIS HOLD ON PARTY AT EXPENSE OF FORMIN KARJALAINEN, WHO IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE SUFFERED SEVERE SETBACK. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE MINISTERS OF PRESENT COALITION GOVERNMENT IN MID-APRIL WERE TRYING TO FIND SOME SOLUTION TO INTERNAL DISPUTE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY, PRESIDENT KEKKONEN APPARENTLY DECIDED THAT SITUATION REQUIRED INFUSION OF HIS POLITICAL EXPERTISE AND POWER.

3. AFTER THE COMMUNISTS ON APRIL 17 HAD SUBMITTED NO CONFIDENCE MOTION IN PARLIAMENT ON GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC RETRENCHMENT PROGRAM, KEKKONEN NEXT DAY LET IT BE KNOWN THAT HE CONSIDERED THAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE CHANCE TO TEST ITS PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT BY ANSWERING NO CONFIDENCE MOTION ON MAY 6, AND THAT DECISION ON DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT SHOULD BE TAKEN ONLY AFTER THIS TEST. KEKKONEN ALSO CALLED PARLIAMENTARY GROUP CHAIRMEN OF COALITION GOVERNMENT PARTIES FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH HIM ON APRIL 22.

4. ON APRIL 20, CENTER PARTY CHAIRMAN, FINANCE MINISTER VIROLAINEN, MADE SPEECH SAYING THAT SPECULATION CONCERNING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WAS UNNECESSARY AS LONG AS KEKKONEN HIMSELF AVAILABLE. ALTHOUGH VIROLAINEN DID NOT MAKE ANY OUTRIGHT PROPOSAL THAT KEKKONEN BE RE-ELECTED IN 1978, SPEECH WAS SEEN AS CONCILIATORY MOVE ON HIS PART AND AS ATTEMPT TO HEAL RIFT BETWEEN THE TWO AFTER VIROLAINEN HAD COME IN FOR SOME HARSH CRITICISM IN KEKKONEN'S LETTER (REF. A).

5. AT THE SAME TIME ELECTION FEVER CONTINUED TO MOUNT UNABATED. COALITION PARTNERS APPEARED UNABLE TO MAKE EVEN SLIGHTEST PROGRESS IN TRYING TO FIND SOLUTION TO INTERNAL DISPUTES.

6. ON APRIL 22 KEKKONEN IN HIS MEETING WITH PARLIAMENTARY GROUP CHAIRMEN PRESENTED TO THEM HIS OWN COMPROMISE

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"SOLUTION." THIS INCLUDED SUGGESTION THAT REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAWS BE PASSED IN FORM PREVIOUSLY AGREED ON WITHIN GOVERNMENT -- THEREBY SUPPORTING SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, BUT ADDING PROVISO THAT SECOND LOOK BE TAKEN AT LAWS AFTER SIX MONTHS -- A SOP TO CENTER PARTY BACKBENCHERS. KEKKONEN ALSO PROPOSED THAT PARLIAMENT GET BACK TO WORK AND PASS SEVERAL KEY BILLS, MOSTLY TIED TO GENERAL INCOMES POLICY AGREEMENT REACHED EARLIER THIS

YEAR, BEFORE SUMMER RECESS OR DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT. PASSING THESE BILLS IS CONSIDERED TO REQUIRE AT LEAST ONE MONTH, AND WOULD "JUSTIFY" NOT DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT UNTIL JUNE -- WHICH IN TURN WOULD MOVE ELECTIONS FROM AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER.

7. SOCDEMS RIGHT AWAY ACCEPTED KEKKONEN'S PROPOSAL. CENTER PARTY FIRST HEDGED, BECAUSE ITS PARTY COUNCIL SCHEDULED MEET APRIL 27. POSSIBLY FEARING CONFRONTATION OR REVOLT BY THE "MEN FROM THE DEEP FORESTS," THE CENTER PARTY REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE UNDERDEVELOPED PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, CENTER PARTY LEADERSHIP ANNOUNCED, HOWEVER, THAT FINAL DECISION ON KEKKONEN PROPOSAL SHOULD BE TAKEN BY PARTY EXEC AND PARLIAMENTARY GROUP RATHER THAN COUNCIL. THIS WAS EVENTUALLY AGREED TO BY COUNCIL, BUT BACKBENCHERS STILL SHOWING CONSIDERABLE RESISTANCE.

8. ON APRIL 24 SOCDEMS IN POLITICAL MOVE EQUALLING THOSE OF KEKKONEN IN ADROITNESS FORMALLY ASKED KEKKONEN IF HE WOULD ACCEPT BEING THEIR CANDIDATE FOR ELECTION AS PRESIDENT IN 1978. THIS MADE SOCDEMS, RATHER THAN CENTER PARTY (FROM WHICH KEKKONEN STEMS), FIRST PARTY TO OFFICIALLY PROPOSE KEKKONEN'S RE-ELECTION. KEKKONEN NOT ONLY READILY ACCEPTED, BUT ALSO INSISTED THAT 1978 ELECTION BE HELD IN NORMAL FASHION, INSTEAD OF ANOTHER SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY EXTENSION OF HIS PRESIDENCY, AS WAS THE CASE FOR THE 1974-78 PERIOD.

9. MOST OTHER PARTIES HAVE RUSHED TO EMBRACE KEKKONEN'S RE-ELECTION AND, ALTHOUGH SOME WILL HAVE TO MAKE THEIR FORMAL DECISION LATER AT PARTY CONGRESSES, IT IS CLEAR NOW, IN CASE ANYONE HAD ANY DOUBT ABOUT IT, THAT KEKKONEN WILL CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT AFTER 1978. THE

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ELECTION OF COURSE WILL BE A MERE FORMALITY.

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10. ALL THESE MOVES TOGETHER HAVE HAD A CALMING
EFFECT ON THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS AND GENERAL
POLITICAL SITUATION. DUE TO THEIR ADROIT MOVES STOCK
OF SOCDEMS AND PRIME MINISTER SORSA IS UP. SO IS THAT
OF CENTER PARTY CHAIRMAN VIROLAINEN. THERE IS SOME
SPECULATION THAT SORSA AND VIROLAINEN WERE IN CAHOOTS
ON KEKKONEN'S RE-ELECTION PLOY, BOTH REPORTEDLY WISHING
FIRST OF ALL TO UNDERCUT THEIR MAIN RIVAL, FONMIN
KARJALAINEN. WHETHER TRUE OR NOT, THAT IS IN ANY CASE
THE EFFECT OF DEVELOPMENTS.

11. BASIC SITUATION CONCERNING CONTINUANCE OF PRESENT
GOVERNMENT AND EARLY ELECTIONS HAS NOT CHANGED HOWEVER.
ELECTION FEVER STILL CONTINUES HIGH AND GOVERNMENT IS
SPENT. ONLY QUESTION IS HOW BEST TO GO ABOUT GIVING
GOVERNMENT DECENT BURIAL AND WHEN ELECTIONS SHOULD BE
HELD.

12. IT IS NOW EXPECTED THAT CENTER PARTY WILL ACCEPT
KEKKONEN COMPROMISE PROPOSAL BY MAY 6, DESPITE CONTINUING
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RESISTANCE BY SOME FORCES NOW CRYSTALLIZING MORE AROUND
YOUNG VICE CHAIRMAN VAYRYNEN RATHER THAN KARJALAINEN.
GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM IN AGAIN SURVIVING NO
CONFIDENCE MOTION ON MAY 8-9. IT IS CONSIDERED LIKELY
THAT PRESENT COALITION GOVERNMENT WILL WORK OUT WITH
KEKKONEN TIMETABLE FOR WHEN IT SHOULD ASK TO BE RELIEVED
OF ITS DUTIES ON GROUNDS OF HAVING PLAYED OUT ITS
ROLE, RATHER THAN ACRIMONIOUSLY BREAKING UP OVER SOME

PARLIAMENTARY ISSUE. TIMING MAY DEPEND ON KEKKONEN'S
DECISION ON WHETHER TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT IN MAY....
(PROBABLY THEN IN LATE MAY BECAUSE AS SOME OF OUR
SOURCES TELL US PRIME MINISTER SORSA IS SCHEDULED TO
MAKE OFFICIAL VISIT TO SOVIET UNION ABOUT MAY 20) --
MEANING AUGUST ELECTIONS; OR WAIT UNTIL JUNE, POSSIBLY
UNTIL AFTER SOCDEM CONGRESS JUNE 5-8, -- MEANING
SEPTEMBER ELECTIONS. AFTER ACCEPTING GOVERNMENT RESIGNATION
AND DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT KEKKONEN IS STILL EXPECTED TO
APPOINT "EXPERT" CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, WITH HELSINKI
MAYOR AURA STILL MOST LIKELY INTERIM PRIME MINISTER.
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